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ABSTRACT

Objectives, administrative organization, and activities of the Senior Alumni Association of the University of Toronto, which consists of members at least 60 years old, are described. The programs of the association are self-sustaining and generated from fees charged for its continuing education courses. Surplus funds generated by these fees are contributed to the University of Toronto, probably to its new program in gerontology. The association does not actively engage as an organization in fund-raising for the university; its focus is its programs and activities. Three categories of activity are advisory, service, and education. Senior alumni are represented on the advisory committee of the program in gerontology and have been asked to serve as resource persons and evaluators in its new diploma course. They also help in designing a new alumni college program. Service functions are called "Alumni Talent Unlimited" and projects include: teaching English as a second language, monitoring careers talks, providing guides for campus tours, and providing guides for the university's library. The continuing education program of the association involves a lecture-discussion series to introduce senior alumni to current university faculty, a preparation for retirement course, and fun-and-fitness program. Each course is designed and implemented by individual committees of senior alumni working in conjunction with the assistant director of the Department of Alumni Affairs. As of 1981, over 500 people had participated in at least one of the association's activities. (SW)

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SENIORS IN ACTION: A CASE STUDY OF PARTICIPATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO BY THE SENIOR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

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The Senior Alumni Association of the University of Toronto consists of all alumni who are at least 60 years of age or who have demonstrated an interest in its programs. It was established in 1975, by the late Wilson Abernethy. Since then (as of 1981) it has grown to a membership of over 500 people who have participated in at least one of its activities.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Association are:

1. To enlist and organize senior alumni of the University of Toronto and their collective talents, experience and wisdom in service-oriented groups.
2. To act as a vehicle to reach out to senior alumni of the University.

These objectives are achieved by:

a) providing voluntary service to the University in areas where fiscal restraints make these services otherwise unavailable (and not as a form of "cheap" labour or as a substitute for paid employees).

b) encouraging senior graduates to become volunteers on campus.

c) acquainting senior alumni with the University's current faculty and facilities through a broad continuing education program.

d) servicing the educational needs of senior alumni.

e) fostering amongst senior alumni awareness of the needs for financial support of the University by donations and by bequests.

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f) being a voice of experience and maturity in the University community and the community at large.

g) projecting an image of senior alumni volunteers as active, adaptable, capable, dependable and enthusiastic people.

GOVERNANCE

The Senior Alumni Association is governed by an executive committee consisting of 15 members. The officers, elected by this committee, are a President and Co-President, a Secretary and Co-Secretary and a Treasurer. The other members, representing each of the Association's activity groups, are appointed. The Committee meets once a month to discuss the business of the Association, make decisions regarding its programmes and receive reports from its actively group committees (educational, service and advisory).

LINKS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF ALUMNI AFFAIRS

The Senior Alumni Association receives advice, guidance and secretarial as well as moral support from the Department of Alumni Affairs of the University. Meeting space is provided free of charge in the Department. The Assistant Director of the Department serves as the liaison as well as co-ordinator of the Association's various activities. He is a voting member of and active participant in its several committees. His services are provided gratis by the University. However, the Association pays for secretarial services, except for association minutes and other routine business matters..

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FINANCES AND FUND-RAISING

The programmes of the Association are entirely self-sustaining. They are paid for out of fees charged for the continuing education courses. The fees are set by the various committees responsible for designing and implementing these programmes. Self-sufficiency was a conscious decision made by the Association during its formative years. Moreover, it was decided that any surplus generated by these fees would be contributed to the University, probably to its new Programme in Gerontology.

Because of the unique nature of alumni fund-raising at the University of Toronto it was decided that the Senior Alumni Association would not actively engage as an organization in raising funds for the University. (All alumni belong to one or more Constituent alumni association identified with academic divisions, all of which are actively engaged in fund-raising for their divisions and the University in general. Therefore, the Senior Alumni Association's efforts in this regard would be redundant and dilute the potential of the other academically-based associations.) Moreover, the Association feared that its service orientation would be weakened by overt association with fund-raising. Instead, individual senior alumni are encouraged to contribute to their academically-based alumni associations. The Senior Alumni Association limits its emphasis to consciousness raising in regard to the need for funds. Accordingly, it focuses on fund-saving rather than fund-raising for the University.

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PROGRAMME AND ACTIVITIES

The heart of the Senior Alumni Association is its programmes and activities. There are three categories of activity: advisory; service; and education.

ADVISORY

Senior alumni are represented on the Advisory Committee to the Programme in Gerontology at the University and work closely with its Director. They have been asked to participate as resource persons and assessors in its new Diploma Course.

Senior Alumni also assist the Assistant Director of the Department of Alumni Affairs in designing the Department's new Alumni College programs.

SERVICE: ALUMNI TALENT UNLIMITED (ATU)

The Senior Alumni service operation goes under the name Alumni Talent Unlimited. It is an unpaid, voluntary bank of senior, retired alumni based on the principle that retired graduates represent a valuable resource of experience and ability which could be mobilized in the service of the University.

It took the ATU four years of constant and unflagging effort to become accepted by the University administration, although some parts of the University community did respond earlier. Indeed its major "selling job" was to senior University administrators. But, once the President of the University became convinced of the value of the ATU and circulated his endorsement, requests for assistance came in from all parts of the University.

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Organizationally, the ATU has developed three basic principles: (i) there are co-chairpersons for every office of the overseeing committee; (ii) volunteers have a back-up person so that if they could no longer attend, there would be someone to take their place; and (iii) the leadership was enthusiastic, involved and especially maintained communication with the volunteers. No project was undertaken without first being investigated by the ATU leaders. They would report their findings back to the overseeing committee, which would make the final decision regarding acceptance. If a project were accepted, they would then seek out volunteers through various channels - word of mouth, friendship networks, the lecture series. Over 200 senior alumni have participated in the various ATU projects (as of mid-1981). Projects include:

- teaching English as a Second Language to foreign students.
- monitoring Careers Talks for students for the University's Career Counselling and Placement Centre and submitting recommendations for improvements as well as designing a Speaker's Guide.
- providing guides for the University's Campus Tours programme. Over twenty alumni are involved in this programme.
- providing guides for the University's main library, as well as editorial assistance for the library's brochures.

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- assisting the Department of Alumni Affairs in upgrading the data on alumni records. Over sixty senior alumni have been involved in providing this service at a saving to the Department (i.e. the University) estimated by the Director at $45,000.00
- providing a part-time librarian to two Colleges of the University.
- assisting the University Archives in indexing material, particularly issues of the University newspaper.
- doing research reading for the Unit of Environmental and Occupational Health in the Faculty of Medicine
- gardening for the Faculty of Forestry.
- short-term assistance to various other Departments, Colleges and divisions (academic and non-academic) of the University such as assisting in periodic mailings, providing editorial assistance to the Director of Student Services of the Faculty of Arts and Science, providing assistance on promotional displays.
- introducing new graduates to the Alumni Association at convocation.

The impact of the ATU is moving beyond the University of Toronto. Two other universities in Ontario are using the ATU as a model for their own senior alumni programmes. Also, it is being used as the basis for a proposed province-wide talent bank. kepresentatives from the ATU have been called upon to advise and assist in both these developments.

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EDUCATIONAL

The continuing education programme of the Senior Alumni falls into two categories. The first type is a lecture-discussion series. Its goal is to introduce senior alumni to current University faculty to enhance their view of the University. The second type is oriented to servicing the needs of senior alumni. There are two separate programmes in this category: a preparation for retirement course and a fun-and-fitness programme.

Each course is designed and implemented by individual committees of senior alumni working in conjunction with the Assistant Director of the Department of Alumni Affairs. There is a minimum of six people on the Lecture-Discussion Series Committee; four on the Preparation for Retirement Committee, and three on the Fun-and-Fitness Committee. Each Committee is self-sustaining, financed by registration fees (set by each Committee) which cover costs (advertising, honoraria, refreshments, etc.). The lecture-discussion series has even produced a surplus.

Canadian Perspectives

The lecture-discussion series, called "Canadian Perspectives", is advertised as "an informal, daytime, academically-oriented lecture and discussion series." Topics and/or lectures are chosen on the basis of a canvass of each "class" as well as input by the Committee which makes the final decision. They cover all fields, disciplines and problems. A list of prospective lectures is then drawn up. Lecturers are limited to University faculty.

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Contact with them is apportioned among the various members of the committee, including the Assistant Director. In five years of operation, the Committee has been refused only once. Lecturers are paid a modest honorarium, although they are not made aware of the fact until they are presented with the cheque. (Only once has a professor asked whether he is going to be paid). Lecturers have frequently made it known that they would welcome a return engagement. This positive reception has worked in favour of the overall Senior Alumni programme's reputation on campus.
The series also has a social component - a coffee break before and between the lecture and discussion. The social aspect is regarded as being essential to the programme and a significant factor in its success. As well, there is one luncheon midway through the series, payment for which is included in the fee. That it is held in the daytime and in an easily accessible place is essential to its success.
(In the fall there are nine lecturers; in the spring there are five).
This programme has proven so successful that each session has been fully subscribed with little effort. Indeed in the spring of 1981 a second section of five lectures was introduced to meet the demand for registration. In the fall of 1981 there will be two sections of nine lectures each.
In the fall of 1980 we had 110 registrants (the maximum allowable because of the lecture-room size); in the spring of 1981, we had a total of 160 people registered.

Pre-Retirement Series

As the title suggests, this programme is designed to prepare those alumni who are about to or have recently retired. As the advertisement for the series puts it: "as more and more men and women are spending in retirement a quarter or more of their adult lives after completing their main careers

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it is becoming increasingly important to obtain useful suggestions on making the most of these years." Topics and lecturers are selected and contacted by a Committee of senior alumni who are knowledgeable about this area. Lecturers are selected on the basis of their expertise. The following topics are covered: the challenge of aging; making the most of your money; health; seniors and the law; housing alternatives; community resources; and, making the most of leisure time. We are always fully subscribed for this programme (maximum 40 people).

Fun-and-Fitness Programme

This programme was introduced in the fall of 1980 as a service to senior alumni. We call it by the acronym HEFL - Health, Exercise and Fun in Your Lifestyle. The motto - and purpose - of this course is "Use It or Lose It." The course, consisting of eight two-hour sessions divided between light exercise and lectures, is taught by an expert who has previously worked with seniors. Because of the programme's success, it was offered again in the spring of 1981. It is held in the daytime.

Advertising for the Continuing Education Programme is done in three ways. Word of mouth is of course, the most potent and flattering form of communication. The participants in Senior Alumni Programmes are mailed a package containing individual announcements of the three programmes. The mailing is also sent to an appropriate graduation year obtained from Alumni Records. This graduation year is mainly chosen for the Preparation

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for Retirement programme, but the other programmes get the benefit of a piggy-back mailing. Mailing is restricted to the metropolitan area of Toronto.

As well, notices regarding the programme are carried in the University's Alumni magazine, the Graduate. As part of a general alumni mailing, this magazine goes as well to all senior alumni in the metropolitan Toronto area (about 6,000 people) and, indeed, throughout the world.

Finally, programmes are planned far enough in advance so that current registrants are informed about them. We accept advance bookings - in fact, registrants have such faith in the quality of the "Canadian Perspectives" lecture discussion series, that it is almost fully subscribed even before the Committee has a complete list of lecturers in place. The Fun-and-Fitness Programme is developing the same pattern. (However, the Preparation for Retirement programme is taken only once).

CONCLUSION

The Senior Alumni Association has proven itself to be a success. It was a good and timely idea as fiscal restraint made volunteer service necessary. On the other hand, the demographics were right as the population of the University's senior alumni has steadily increased. It has taken five years of hard, consistent, diligent work. That it has succeeded, has been the result of a true partnership between Senior Alumni leaders and the Department of Alumni Affairs. Without the calibre of Senior Alumni who have provided leadership, the programme would not have achieved as much as it has.

Senior leadership is a necessary component. No alumni department nor other agency nor organization could institute this sort of programme without dedicated seniors.

ADDENDUM

In 1981 the Senior Alumni Association won two awards from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). (This is an organization of professionals engaged in the area of "institutional advancement" that is, alumni relations, fund-raising and public relations. Based in Washington, D.C., CASE has a membership of over 2,500 post-secondary institutions primarly in North America).

The first award was "The Grand Award" for "Volunteer Involvement" which encomposed the total Senior Alumni Association enterprise. The other award, a "Citation Award" for "Alumni Service to the Institution", was specifically for the Alumni Talent Unlimited (ATU) programme. The awards reflected international recognition and represented the first "Grand Award" for a Canadian member of CASE.

With the "Grand Award" came a $500.00 prize donated by the Ford Motor Co. This money (and the Awards as well) was actually won by the University of Toronto's Department of Alumni Affairs which is a member of CASE. Nevertheless, the prize money was given by the Department to the Senior Alumni Association, which in turn added to it an additional $500.00 out of its own treasury. This $1,000.00 was given to the University to capitalize an annual prize accrued for the Diploma in Gerontology program. The prize was named "the Senior Alumni Association - Wilson W. Abernethy Prize", Mr. Abernethy's name being added to commemorate his memory. Furthermore, the Senior Alumni Association has undertaken a special fund-raising drive in Mr. Abernethy's honour, the proceeds of which will be earmarked for purchasing books (and if there are sufficient funds, furnishing a reading room) in Gerontology for the University.

SENIOR SERVICE

The University is basking in brilliant reflected glory as a result of the activities of the Senior Alumni association. The more than 600 retirees involved in its programs have made U of T the first Canadian university to win a Grand Award from the Washington-based Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), an international association. The Senior Alumni program was deemed to be the best volunteer involvement program among entrants across North America. The $500 award from the Ford Motor Company which was presented to Senior Alumni founding father Wilson Abernethy at a ceremony in West Hall of University College on June 24 by CASE president James Fisher will be turned over to the University's gerontology program. The Senior Alumni's Talent Unlimited program has also received a CASE citation for alumni service to the parent institution.

STEVE BEHAL

WILSON ABERNETHY (LEFT) AND GORDON ROMANS (RIGHT), FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE SENIOR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, ACCEPT AWARD PLAQUE FROM CASE PRESIDENT JAMES FISHER.